A Song of Rest.

Oh weary hands! that all the day,
Were set to labor hard and long,
Now softly fall the shadows gray,
The bells are rung for even song.
An hour ago the golden sun
Sank slowly down into the west;
Poor, weary hands, your toil is done;
'Tis time for rest!—'tis time for rest!

O weary feet! that many a mile
Have trudged along a stony way,
At last ye reach the trysting stile;
No longer fear to go astray,
The gently bending, rustling trees,
Rock the young birds within the nest,
And softly sing the quiet breeze:
"Tis time for rest!—'tis time for rest!"

O weary eyes! from which the tears
Fell many a time like thunder rain—
O weary heart! that through the years
Beat such bitter, restless pain,—
To-night forget the stormy strife,
And know what Heaven shall send is best;
Lay down the tangled web of life;
'Tis time for rest!—'tis time for rest!

FLORENCE TYLER.

A Model Congregation.

BY E. MASON.

Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God. Acts 10 : 33.

This was the first Gentile audience that Peter ever addressed, and he had been brought face to face with it by a chain of events most strikingly providential. The congregation, though not remarkable in point of numbers, was one of the most important assemblies that ever listened to preaching from Apostolic lips. The scene was one of surpassing interest. A philosopher would have seen in it a significant indication of the crumbling away of ancient and deeply-rooted prejudices. A Christian would have hailed in it the type and precessor of the time when men would come from all points of the compass and sit down with Abraham Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. This was the morning dawn of a glorious day of Christian glory that would encircle the earth. But we expect to confine our study to one special feature of this circumstance. This small company composed of Cornelius and his "kinsmen and near friends," along with "certain brethren of the circumcision from Joppa," who had accompanied the apostle, may be viewed as a *model congregation.*

1. *All who had been made aware of the religious service were present.* "Now therefore are we *all* here present before God." With commendable kindness, the Roman centurion, in certain expectation of Peter's arrival, had invited his "kinsman and near friends" to meet and hear the apostle. Every Gentile who had been apprised of the coming of Peter from Joppa to Cesarea, and asked to meet him, was at the appointed place ere his arrival. Peter "found *many* that were come together." Not *very* many at the most, for this was but an apostolic kitchen meeting, but there were no absentees. "We are *all* here." They were led to expect a Divine message at the lips of the apostle, and, Gentiles though they were, they did not consider the time lost or misspent that was devoted to the hearing of it. It was not a Sabbath-day meeting, but a week-day one, yet these "friends and acquaintances" of Cornelius gladly left their worldly engagements to listen to the good news of the kingdom. Ah! does not this meeting of heathen "inquirers" reprove multitudes who are professed Christians? Does not this week-day gathering rebuke those who find it difficult to overcome their unwillingness to attend a Sabbath service?

The empty benches on Sabbath morning at our churches is a silent rebuke and burning disgrace to our Christianity. I have known people that could get up at 3 or 4 for several successive mornings in the week, ride from 8 to 20 miles before daylight to visit a county fair or go on a pleasure party, the same parties will find it a fearful task to drive from 2 to 6 miles to be present at Sabbath school by 9 o'clock once a week. And how many are the excuses. There is the Sunday headache, a little indisposition which is only another name for a genuine attack of old-fashioned laziness and disinclination to come to the house of God. The poor minister will study and rack his brain during the week to interest the congregation and make it worth their while to come to church. Then imagine the discouragement when only a few will come. Perhaps the majority have found out they must visit some old friends, they have not seen for a long time, or they have been working so hard they do not feel like coming, or somebody comes to visit them and so must stay at home to give them a "big dinner." Anyway, the church has to take a back seat, when anything else comes in the way.

Brethren, this is all wrong. I have often thought of the flimsiness of these excuses. Why not, when you have company bring them to church, introduce them to your church, and you do not know what good you may be doing. Let them have a feast of the good things of the Gospel, and they will be better prepared to appreciate the good things you have in store for them. Feed the heart before you feed the stomach. Perhaps your company do not often get an opportunity to go to church, and this may be the very thing they would like. What would be said of a minister that would remain away from his post on such excuses? It is your duty, as much as it is his, to come to these Sabbath day services. Your flimsy excuses, and the frequency of your absence is proof that you need more spiritual food to arouse your faith and strength.

Encourage your minister by your presence and enthusiasm. There is only one of two things the matter when you remain away so often: you have either lost your love for the service of the Lord or you are tired of your minister. If you say you have not lost your love for God and his service, then you do not like your minister. In that case a change ought to be made. A church ought not to suffer on account of an unpopular minister. If you say you like the minister then you have lost your love for the service of God. Now which is it? Would that it could be said by every assembled Christian congregation this day assembled over the length and breadth of our land, "We are all," save those necessarily absent, "here present."

Some of you are very punctual in keeping your appointments, you would not break an engagement for anything. Now the Sabbath day is the Lord's, you have an engagement with him. Do not break it. The Lord is waiting here to meet with you. Then come, yea come cheerfully.

2. *All were present in good time.* "*Now* therefore are we all here present." The congregation waited for the preacher, not the preacher for the congregation. They were at the appointed place in good time. Propriety itself demanded this. Good manners ought to teach persons to come in time. How often has the congregation been disturbed by persons coming in late. Coming sometimes when the services are half over. This becomes a disease and a habit in some people. They are never in time only when they are to receive some benefit. If they are to meet a man at a certain hour to have a debt paid—to receive something, they are there in good time. But under any other circumstances they are always behind. We know that this is sometimes unavoidable, but when the same ones are always tardy, it is a constitutional malady.

When people are punctual, it shows they are anxious to serve the Lord. This is the verdict we would render in any other case, then why should religion be an exception? The loss of any part of it, even of what is commonly but wrongly called the "preliminary services," is detrimental to the full profit and enjoyment of the rest. Too often the services of praise, and prayer, and Scripture reading are regarded as mere customary appendages of little moment. This is a mistake. To *hear* well, there must be the preparation which the previous parts of the service are fitted to aid. The *whole* service is the *worship of God.* A deeper sense of this, and of the irreverence of interrupting the services by late arrival, is needed to bring many up to the platform of this model congregation in apostolic times, of which a member could truthfully say, "*Now* therefore are we all here." The too common spectacle of crowds of worshippers entering God's house after the services are begun is not only an unseemly one, but injurious to the composure and profiting of those who are already engaged in worshiping God. Let us seek to preserve the symmetry of our religious meetings unbroken.

3. *All were characterized by a devout spirit.* "We are all here present *before God.*" What a realizing sense of the Divine presence is manifest in these simple words! The whole company felt themselves to be "on holy ground." The circumstances were solemn and momentous. They felt not merely to be before Peter to hear him but "before God." So that not merely courtesy toward the apostle, but reverence toward God, ought to command our earnest and respectful attention. We generally judge the devotion and anxiety to hear God's word, by the appearance of the congregation. People sometimes get into the habit of acting very slovenly in the house of God. Whether intentional or not, it does not look well. It is one of the bad habits we get into. When we see people lounging around lazily, shifting their positions often as if the whole thing was a bore to them, we conclude they are on nettles and are uncomfortable, and they would rather be somewhere else. We sometimes see people sitting there wondering how they can while away the time, they will take up the hymn book and read awhile, then when tired of that pick their teeth awhile, and then by way of a change clean their finger nails, and we sometimes verily believe that, were it not for the look of the thing, they would pull out their newspaper and read it. When these things are done by non-professors of religion it is bad enough, but when done by church members, it is inexcusable. Do we realize that we are in God's presence? If we were called into the presence of some great one of the earth, we would hardly act thus, how much more should we remember we are "before God."

We cannot always expect people to sit as quiet as statues but we expect respectful and reverential attitudes by those who are professed members of the church. God is in a sense everywhere present. We are, whether worshiping or not, always "before God;" but specially and emphatically we are "before God" in our public religious services, whether of week-day or Sunday, whether under lowly cottage roof or in a grand Cathedral. Mark that the irreverence of those who are followers of God, will not strike the non-professors very favorably, and may be the means of instilling into their minds, imperceptably but surely, a spirit of irreverence likewise. The great Object of worship marks the absent, and notes the irreverent, the critical, the formal, the distracted, the sleepy worshiper.

4. *All were present for a definite purpose.* "To hear all things that are commanded thee of God." Look at their eager expectation. "All present *to hear.*" They had come together not accidentally, or out of custom, but with a distinct and definite purpose. They were expecting a shower of heavenly manna, and had come to gather it. Not assembled merely "to see and be seen," to enjoy "an intellectual treat," to have their craving for novelty gratified by hearing "some new thing;" not collected like the crowd at Ephesus "the greater part of whom knew not wherefore they had come together,"—but longing to hear words whereby they "might be saved."

Again, mark they came to hear "*all things that are commanded thee of God.*" That is, that we may obey them. They wished to be "hearers" in order to be "doers of the word." This is the great end of preaching—to bring men to the "obedience of faith." And to gain this end there must be faithful preaching—"all things that are commanded thee of God."—and faithful hearing. The preacher is not to confine himself to narrow segments of beliefs and duties, but in due proportion to declare "the *whole* counsel of God." And the obedience is to be as wide-reaching as the message. Not only willingness to hear "smooth things," pet doctrines, certain kinds of sermons; but willingness to hear and profit by "all things" that the preacher may say—whether of doctrine, reproof, promise or instruction—in so far as they are "commanded of God."

What a model congregation this was! All present—all present in good time—all present to hear—all present to obey "all things" commanded of God. And what was the result? Just what might have been expected. A spiritual harvest, many brought into the Redeemer's fold. If our congregations were followers of this one, might we not expect like or even greater spiritual results?